

STATINTL

THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL UNDER  
TRUMAN, EISENHOWER, AND KENNEDY \*

THE National Security Council, in the words of one observer, "constitutes the most ambitious effort yet made to coordinate policy on the cabinet level in the American federal government."<sup>1</sup> Created by the National Security Act of 1947 and subsequently modified or expanded by Congress and the President, it represents an attempt to fill a long-recognized need for a single, top-ranking body to formulate and correlate national policy. Its roots lay in the British Committee of Imperial Defense, a Cabinet agency for coordinating national security matters, and in certain American attempts to provide a similar mechanism. The American efforts dated back to World War I but took form most notably in the Standing Liaison Committee of the early nineteen-forties and the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee established in 1944.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the Committee of Imperial Defense was an arrangement more suited to Cabinet than to presidential government, and none of the American examples was extensive or effective enough to solve the pressing problems of policy formulation and direction that arose in the hectic days following World War II. It was at the height of the postwar unification struggle, then, that Ferdinand Eberstadt, in a study prepared for Navy Secretary James Forrestal, urged the

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Y. Hammond, "The National Security Council as a Device for Interdepartmental Coordination: An Interpretation and Appraisal," *American Political Science Review*, LIV (1960), 899.

<sup>2</sup> For these and other roots of the NSC, see *ibid.*, 899-901; U. S. Senate, Committee on Naval Affairs, *Unification of the War and Navy Departments and Postwar Organization for National Security*, Report to Hon. James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy by Ferdinand Eberstadt, 79th Congress, 1st Session, 1945, 47-54 (hereinafter, *Eberstadt Report*); Ernest R. May, "The Development of Political-Military Consultation in the United States," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXX (1955), 161-80.

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